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From "Lights and Shadows of German Life."
"IT IS VERY POSSIBLE."

This was the favorite exclamation of the late Baron Stryk. It would even creep into the reports which he laid before the council, and draw forth a smile, such as we are wont to bestow upon our neighbor's foible, from his official brethren. The baron had possessed the confidence of two successive sovereigns, he was universally acknowledged to be a man of learning, judgment, and profound knowledge of human nature. His reputation on these points was perhaps greater than he really deserved. He was not only esteemed, but feared, by his brother diplomats, since they could not trust one whom they believed deeper than themselves. And yet the baron was an open-hearted, honorable, conscientious man, whose conduct was unimpeachable in every respect. This, however, was considered as the result of double art, and a conclusive reason for their being on their guard against him. Yet the reputation which he enjoyed of being the most clear-sighted politician of his day, was founded on little more than the tone in which he repeated on every occasion, "It is very possible!"

Some anecdotes of a man so remarkable in the political history of his country, may afford amusement to the curious in human peculiarities. We are indebted for them partly to his own journal, and partly to the recollections of his son.

This favorite phrase of the baron's was the result of all his actions. When it escaped him, as it often did involuntarily, he would consider its possible application to the subject in hand, by which he was on many occasions led to rectify or clear his views. It influenced not only his opinions, but his conduct, so advantageously, that he endeavored to persuade his only son, Fritz, to adopt it.

But Fritz, after the manner of young people in general, imagined himself wiser than his father, and was disposed to think the practice rather quizzical.

"Such a peculiarity is very pardonable, my dear father, in a man like you, but the imitation of it in me would appear ludicrous."

"It is very possible," replied the baron, "but what does that signify, if by this simple expedient, you gain peace, equanimity, and reflection—the chief components of human happiness? But if you will not expose yourself to the world's dread laugh by uttering the words aloud, at least utter them mentally on all occasions."

Fritz smiled.
"What would you have me inherit my serenity of mind, Fritz," continued his father, "and strange and perhaps absurd as you may think it, I can assure with truth, that I owe all I am, all I possess, to these four little words."

"What could first induce you to adopt them?" said the young man.

"Misfortune and despair, under which my youth would have sunk, but for the support they afforded me. By them I obtained the mastery over myself."

"My parents were excellent, pious people, in confined circumstances. They left barely enough to defray my expenses at college, and to maintain me until such a time as I might reasonably hope to obtain some employment."

"I was young and uncorrupted—I had studied much, and my imagination had surrounded me with ideal beings gifted with all that is great and noble in character. To this may be attributed the misfortunes of my early life. For I remained ignorant of the real world, at one time believing it to be peopled by angels, and at another by devils, just according to what I had met with last."

"That is very often the case with me, even now," observed Fritz.

"It is very possible," rejoined his father,—"For the young man who has never fallen into such errors, must either be cold or corrupted. *Il faut en passer par là.*"

"To resume my story—I was obliged to work as an unsalaried clerk for a considerable time, before I obtained an insignificant office with a meagre stipend. I did not, however, complain, as it was natural in the course of things, and I was prepared for it. I concealed my poverty—for had it been known, both high and low, rich and poor, would have rated me far below my real merits. I took care, therefore, always to be well dressed, occupied good lodgings, and frequented the best company. Now and then, too, I consented to join a party of pleasure, where I knew I should be called upon to spend more than was convenient to me. Yet, with all this, I kept clear of debts, a point which always tells in favor of a young man of my age and situation in life—and while every body believed me to be in affluent circumstan-

ces I really spent very little. All this while no one suspected the fact that I lived more frugally than any galley slave—never tasting anything but bread and water, or milk. Still I was happy, not only in the consciousness of duty faithfully discharged, and in the hope of a more prosperous fortune, but I was really content with my present lot, and not without reason, for I was every where well received; I was popular with the women, and not disliked by the men."

"Amongst the latter, however, I had but one chosen and intimate friend, a young lawyer named Schneemüller. It might have been said that we had but one heart and one will, so perfectly did our tastes and feelings accord. He had risked his life for me in a duel at the University, and given me a thousand proofs of friendship afterwards."

"Among my female acquaintance there was also one whom I preferred to all the rest—Philippine, the daughter of old General Von Tyten. I loved her long in silence, unconscious how deeply. I looked upon her as a being of superior order, and never approached but with humble adoration. My passion was known only to my own heart, for I could never bring myself to disclose it. There are feelings so sacred that we fear to profane them by utterance. Hence our reluctance to speak to a third person of our love, or to discuss religious sentiments in company."

"Did you not confide your feelings to your friend?"

"No, not even to him—on the contrary, I heard first from him what seemed at that time incredible—that it was generally said that Philippine was in love with me, and that some unpleasant scenes had passed between her and her mother in consequence."

"Schneemüller's information was, however, confirmed about six months after, when Philippine and I happened to visit a mutual friend at the same time, and the opportunities of greater intimacy afforded by a country house, led to the disclosure of our respective feelings. Of course, we swore, and believed that our love could only terminate with life."

"From this moment I was in Heaven, and fortune seemed to shower her favors upon me. I obtained a place in the Dowager Duchess's household, with a respectable salary."

The gulf between me and Philippine seemed to contract. The general began to treat me more confidentially, and his wife was less hard upon Philippine for her romantic notions on certain subjects."

"Soon after this a distant relation died in Batavia, and left me all his property, which was very considerable, and vested in the Dutch funds, from whence it could not be drawn without some formalities. I rejoiced in this accession, but only for Philippine's sake."

"About this time Count Cronstad, a handsome young man, and our sovereign's favorite, began to pay her great attention. She perceived that I was uneasy, and not only laughed and coaxed my jealousy away, but urged me also to make serious proposals to her father. I was a shy man, and detested such formalities, but I prepared to comply. It was necessary, in the first place, that I should go to Amsterdam, to take possession of my cousin's bequest, that I might be provided with all the qualifications the old general would require in a son-in-law."

The idea of such a long journey was, however, disagreeable to me; partly because I could not bear the separation from Philippine, partly because she herself objected to my going; and partly because the continued assidues of the handsome and brilliant count, made me a little fidgety still. At last it was agreed that, instead of going myself, I should give a letter of attorney to Schneemüller, whose knowledge of law would enable him to expedite matters, should any difficulty arise with the executors."

"How comes it," asked Fritz, "that I never heard you speak of this friend of yours before?"

"That you shall see," replied his father.

"Days and weeks passed, without a single line from Schneemüller. I wrote to him again and again. At last it struck me that some dreadful accident must have befallen him in the way, or that he must be very ill. Love gave way to friendship; and, in spite of Philippine's tears I set off for Amsterdam."

"I inquired at every relay, and traced my friend by the *livre des voyageurs*. On my arrival at Amsterdam, I drove straight to the mercantile house with which he was to have transacted the chief part of the business. I found that he had been there, and had received the whole amount of my inheritance, on giving the proper receipts, which were shown to me."

"I continued my search, and with the aid of the police, I discovered that a man answering to the description I gave of Schneemüller's figure had embarked, about three weeks before, in an American ship for New York. I kept repeating to myself, and to every body else, 'It is impossible!' But the fact was ascertained beyond all doubt. My best and only friend had betrayed me."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Fritz.

"Distress of mind and fatigue threw me into a fever. As soon, however, as I was able to travel, I returned home, broken-hearted, not for the loss of my money, though that was serious enough, since it might prove an obstacle to

my union with Philippine, but for the loss of my friend, and for the loss of what was far more precious to me than all the gold of Peru—my confidence in human nature!"

"I arrived too late to present myself that evening at Gen. Von Tyten's, otherwise I should have flown to Philippine, whom I had apprised by letter of my misfortune as soon as I discovered it. The proprietor of the house in which I lodged, an old companion in office, came in to see me, just as I had made up my mind to postpone my visit till to-morrow. After returning his salutation, I asked what news."

"Nothing particular," said he—"nothing but what you probably know already—General Von Tyten's beautiful daughter is last married."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed. "You are jesting or dreaming."

"Neither one nor the other. She is married to Count Cronstad."

"Count Cronstad! impossible! It cannot be!"

"How very strange," said he, "that you should not have heard what made so much noise here. But the wonder is near a fortnight old, and has ceased to be talked about."

"My friend gave a circumstantial detail of what was known respecting the marriage, by which it appeared that Philippine had not required much persuasion to give her hand to this rich and powerful young nobleman, and that, too, shortly after receiving the account of my disasters at Amsterdam. I could not, however, give full credit to my informant, but exclaimed at every pause in his narrative, 'Impossible! I can't believe it!'"

"I spent the night in great agitation, yet trying all the time to persuade myself that it was a mistake of my gossiping host's; still repeating, 'This impossible!—impossible! that Philippine should prove a jilt!'"

Before twelve o'clock the next day, however, I heard the confirmation of my misfortune, not only from a dozen acquaintances whom I met on my way to the general's, but from the general himself, who was still so pre-occupied by his daughter's good fortune, that he never observed the consternation which I must have betrayed."

"Infernal!" cried Fritz, his indignation boiling over.

"So I thought at the time," continued the baron, "for though the general had not committed himself by any positive promise, since I had not made any formal proposal, yet he could not but have perceived the terms on which I was with Philippine. Thus betrayed by the two persons in whom all my affections, and all my happiness, were centered, I trusted nothing more on earth. The love of woman, the truth of man, and the stability of fortune, were to me but as shadows. All that I had supposed impossible had happened—and to the strangest and most unlikely things, I always answered, 'It is very possible!'"

"In these words is contained the whole of that wisdom for which the world has been pleased to give me credit. I resolved not only to utter, but to think them on every occasion. They were my comfort under affliction. I learned to depend on nothing here below, save my own will. Canst thou ever again be happy? have I said to myself. 'It is very possible,' was the reply, and so it proved. Fortune's favors dazzled me no more: for I thought of the past—and felt that evil days might come again."

"One of my happiest days was that on which, you, Fritz, first saw the light. But I tempered my joy with the reflection that death might snatch you from me, or you might live, and turn out a scoundrel. The 'tis possible' sobered me, and I was armed against the worst."

"But God be praised, father," said Fritz, "neither has happened."

"Yet they were not the less possible, Fritz—since I adopted these words for my motto, I take every bright moment as a gift from Heaven; but without supposing that it is to last. In the same manner I am resigned in every dark one, equally persuaded that the light will dawn again."

No one can dispute the truth of the privy councillor's theory: yet his favorite saying brought him into more scrapes than one, at least into what most people would have deemed such. But his serenity was not easily troubled. For instance, one day, about the time of the French Revolution, a cabinet council was held, at which his sovereign, the elector of ——— was present. Business being over, a conversation ensued relative to the late horrible outrage committed at Paris and Lyons."

"Who could have supposed," said the elector, "that a nation hitherto so slavishly devoted to their kings, would have proceeded to such opposite extremes!—Franchmen only could be guilty of such inconsistency. I am quite sure that neither my subjects, nor those of any other German prince, would rejoice over the fall of their sovereign. Do you think it possible?"—Stryk!"

But Stryk had been absorbed in his own meditations during the greater part of the conversation—and of the question addressed to him by the Prince, he had only heard the last words. He shrugged his shoulders, and mechanically repeated his favorite phrase—"It is very possible!"

The elector made a step backwards. "What do you mean?" said he—"What motive have

you for supposing that my people would rejoice in my destruction?"

"It is very possible!" replied Stryk, awakened from his reverie. "We cannot see into futurity: nothing is so unstable as the people, whom the people consist of men, every one of whom prefers himself to his sovereign. A new order of things gives birth to new prospects—new hopes."

The hope of obtaining good, is more seductive than the possession of the good itself. Much and deservedly as your Electoral Highness is beloved by your people, I would not swear that in altered circumstances, forgetful of your benefits, they would not illuminate and shout for a republic, or for the success of an usurper. It is very possible."

"You are not in your senses, Counsellor Stryk," replied the elector, angrily, and turning upon his heel.

Stryk fell into disgrace, and every body called him a fool."

A few years after this, the French armies crossed the Rhine. The elector and his court took flight. The people shouted for liberty and equality, pulled down the electoral arms, and illuminated the capital for his departure."

Stryk's experience and efficiency as a man of business, might have obtained him a high appointment under the new government, but the well-known cause of his disgrace with the elector insured it. He was looked upon as a victim of the Prince's despotism, and the new order of things being confirmed, he recovered his character for wisdom. Though his mind was naturally ardent, he never indulged in political enthusiasm. He exhibited no party-spirit, and consequently the Jacobins suspected him of being at heart a royalist; while the royalists hated him for the Jacobinical principles which they thought he disguised under outward moderation. He laughed at both, and honestly discharged his duty."

A member of the French republican government visited the department. He was received with all possible distinction. Every body crowded round and sought to obtain importance in his eyes. Amongst them there were not wanting some who tried to obtain their object by insinuating doubts as to the sincerity of Stryk's attachment to the revolution and to the republic. An entertainment was given in honor of the Frenchman. After drinking with "enthusiasm," as the newspapers would say, to the rights of the people, the cause of freedom all over the world, and the victorious career of the republic, the great man addressed himself to Stryk, who sat next him, and said:

"Nothing surprises me more than that these monarchs should still venture to oppose us. It can only hasten their own destruction. Our glorious revolution will set an example for all the rest of the world. What can the fools hope for? Do they imagine that all their armies united can subdue the greatest nation in the universe, and force the detested race of Bourbon upon us?—Blackheads! All Europe shall perish first! What say you citizen? Do you think it probable that monarchy should ever be re-established in France?"

"Certainly not probable," replied Stryk, "but very possible."

"How! very possible?" continued the Frenchman, in a voice that startled the company—"No man can be a true friend to liberty who doubts of its duration. I am sorry citizen that a man so high in office as you are should hold such doctrines. How can you defend them?"

"Why it is very possible," calmly returned Stryk. "Athens first submitted to a Pericles and then to a king of Macedon. Greece first bowed the neck to a king of Macedon. Rome first bowed the neck to a triumvirate, then to a Caesar, and lastly to a Nero. England beheaded her king—was governed by a Cromwell—and ended by recalling Charles II."

"Why quote Greeks, Romans, and English?" said the Frenchman.

"What have we to do with nations so utterly devoid of character, and fit for slavery alone? You cannot, surely, compare them with the French? But I forgive your mistaken views. You were born on the wrong side of the Rhine."

Notwithstanding this assurance of forgiveness, Stryk was arrested soon after, deprived of his office, and subjected to a series of vexatious interrogatories for having promulgated sentiments unfavorable to liberty."

In a few years Napoleon became first consul, then consul for life, then emperor and king.

Stryk's acknowledged ability and uprightness, and the circumstance of his having constantly belonged to the moderate party, caused him to be restored to his former rank and employments. From this time he was held in higher estimation than ever—so much of what he had foretold had come to pass that he was looked upon as a political prophet. Napoleon metamorphosed the world, and gave away thrones. Stryk became the servant of one of these new made monarchs, who loaded him with honors. Republican principles went out of fashion, and all bowed before the new sovereign. Each flattered himself that he had alone preserved his senses amid the general intoxication. No greater insult could be offered to a man than to insinuate that he had ever ceased to be a royalist."

"See no cause for offence," said the coun-

sellor, one morning, when an altercation, mixed up with bitter taunts and reproaches, arose among a party of his most intimate friends;—"You do ill to unbraide one another with having caught an epidemic from which none altogether escaped, and which may return under similar circumstances. It is very possible, believe me."

"What! do you take me for such a fool?—I, at least!"—indignantly said or thought each of those to whom he addressed himself—"am not so easily blown about by every wind that blows."

"You remind me of an Egyptian Sultan in the Spectator," said Stryk. "He piqued himself on the strength of mind which raised him above the prejudices and superstitions of the vulgar. Among the sacred subjects which he was fond of ridiculing was the chapter of the Koran in which it is related that the angel Gabriel appeared to Mahomet one morning, as he lay in bed, and conducted him through hell and the seven heavens. Mahomet not only saw all that was to be seen, but held ninety thousand conferences with God, and all in so short a space of time that on his return to earth he found his bed still warm, and a pitcher of water which he had overturned at his departure not quite emptied. One day that the sultan was exercising his wit on this miracle in presence of a Sultan, renowned for his sanctity, and supposed to have performed miracles—the holy man promised to heal the sultan of his incredulity, if he would do as he directed. The sultan assented, and the Sultan led him to a tub of water, and desired him to plunge his head in, and draw it out again immediately. The sultan did as he was directed, and scarcely felt the cold water touch his head, when he found himself alone at the foot of a mountain on the sea shore. He cursed the sultan and resolved to make him repent his temerity. But there was nothing to be done but to submit to his fate. Fortunately, he spied some woodcutters at a little distance, who directed him to a city on the other side of the wood. He dared not say he was the sultan of Egypt, for who would believe it at such a distance from home, for the woodcutters had told him that he was on the shore of the Caspian sea. After many adventures he gained the favor of a rich man, who gave him his daughter in marriage—she brought him seven sons and as many daughters, and then died. By a series of misfortunes he was plunged into extreme misery, and reduced to the necessity of begging his bread in the streets. He wept at the remembrance of all his former power and magnificence, and acknowledged the reverse to be a just punishment for his unbelief. Thus repentant, he undertook a pilgrimage to Mecca. He stopped before he ventured to enter the city to bathe in the river. He undressed and plunged in. On raising his head above the water, however, he was astonished to find that, instead of being in the river, he was standing by the tub in the presence of the Sultan and all his court; and still more to learn from them that he had never moved from the spot, but had merely dipped his head into the water and taken it out again. You, my good friends," continued the counsellor, "are in the same predicament as the Egyptian Sultan. Had any one told you before the revolution what you would do during its course, you would not have believed him. Your heads are now out of the tub, and you will not confess what you thought, felt, or did, during the magical moment. Should the emigre Bourbons and nobles return to France, (and it is very possible) I wager that you will disbelieve the reality of all that has passed since 1789, and stand, like the sultan by the side of the tub, rejoicing that all he had undergone was but the baseless fabric of a vision."

The company laughed. The counsellor's story had at least given them time to cool, and all were now in good humor, while a few even allowed he was right. In fact, he lived to see the fall of Napoleon, and the restoration of legitimate monarchy."

This reaction could not prove dangerous to a man of Stryk's opinions, especially as he was disgraced towards the close of Napoleon's career on account of an unfortunate application of his favorite saying to the event of the projected invasion of Russia."

The new legitimate of course re-appointed all who had incurred the displeasure of the Corsican usurper; and Stryk was again in office. But he did not continue there long. The sovereign giving him to understand one day, that his having served under so many different governments, occasioned his being looked upon as a trimmer."

"It is very possible," replied the old man in his dry mechanical manner. "For," he added after a moment's thought, "I have ever been a faithful servant of the state."

"That is somewhat contradictory," said the prince. "How can a man be called a faithful servant of the state, who pays court to a rightful master one day, to a usurper the next?"

"Just because I have always endeavored, sir, to be the servant of the State and not of a Master. Under bad rulers, it becomes doubly the duty of every friend of his country to devote himself to its service."

This distinction between the ruler and the people sounded somewhat radical in the ears of the legitimate, and it was not long before the counsellor received his congee with a retiring

Paris, May 20, 1834.

